

# 10 toxic hotspots in the home

Here's how to get rid of toxins in each room of your house.

Knowing that toxins are everywhere can make the challenge of getting rid of them all the more formidable. But just as people typically clean their homes room by room, eliminating toxic-ridden items in the same orderly room-by-room fashion may be just the perk that environmentally conscious homeowners need.

Here's a tour of 10 areas of a home that that toxic objects or furnishings like to inhabit.

*--By Coeli Carr for MSN Healthy Living*



## **Kitchen: Oven Cleaner**

For consumers without a self-cleaning oven, periodic scrub downs are mandatory. Unfortunately, commercially available oven cleaners can be just as onerous as the cleaning task at hand. "Oven cleaners are full of dangerous ingredients, including lye – also known as 'caustic soda' – ethers, ethylene glycol, methylene chloride and petroleum distillates," says Walter Crinnion, a naturopathic physician and chair of the environmental medicine department at Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine in Tempe, Arizona.

Because oven cleaners with these ingredients can burn the skin, it's important to wear gloves while handling the item. Even spraying the aerosol contents involves releasing the neurotoxic solvent butane.

Fortunately, a simple paste of baking soda and water, applied to the mess, may be all you need to keep your oven clean. And to cut down on grease deposits, lay pans or foiled-lined receptacles at the bottom of the oven to help catch pan drippings.



## **Bathroom: Toothpaste**

Having a favorite toothpaste may help ensure good dental hygiene. But the anti-bacterial and toxic ingredient triclosan, found in many dentifrices, may harm the rest of your body.

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has noted that triclosan has been found in everyone they’ve done toxicity testing on,” says Crinnion, the author of *Clean, Green & Lean: Get Rid of the Toxins that Make You Fat*.

“Think of triclosan as a chlorinated pesticide, which means that it causes allergies and imbalances the immune system, just like other chlorinated pesticides.” In children the substance has been associated with high rates of hay fever. Because, says Crinnion, the substance has become part of our toxic burden, he advises against buying toothpaste and other products containing this ingredient.



## Dining Room: Candles

Burning candles can add more than atmosphere to an event. Candlelight usually means the room is filling up with toxins. “To enhance slow burning, many candles on the market, mainly those that are scented, have metal wires that contain lead inside their wicks,” says Crinnion. “These wicks are responsible for a hazardous level of lead release, which has been associated with learning disabilities and Parkinson’s Disease. And the candles’ artificial fragrances contain plasticizers and other solvent-type mixtures.”

Crinnion underscores the toxic risk that occurs with all types of combustion, even when you’re burning natural beeswax candles. “Combustion involves the release of hydrocarbons which leads to oxidative damage and respiratory problems,” he says. His advice: “Burn candles only on special occasions and not for long periods of time.”



## Living Room: Carpets

Right below cigarette smoke, carpets are the worst polluters in the home,” says Crinnion. “They contain a host of environmental chemicals, including flame retardants, anti-stain ingredients, and volatile organic compounds.” He notes that one substance in new carpets is p-dichlorobenzene, which is a carcinogen. And the “new carpet smell” that so many homeowners are proud of? “That comes from 4-Phenylcyclohexene, which is a by-product of a process used in carpet backing, and has been linked to visual, nasal and respiratory problems,” he says. Crinnion advises swapping out carpets for cotton throw rugs or, better yet, going barefoot on wood or tile floors.



## **Laundry Room: Dryer Sheets**

Everyone likes clean clothes. But using dryer sheets to impart fragrance to freshly laundered items may have harmful physical consequences. “The components of synthetic fragrances, including benzyl acetate, benzyl alcohol and terpenes, are toxic, and some are carcinogenic,” says Crinnion.

Crinnion says consumers who buy dryer sheets mainly for the fragrance need to realize that clothes being tossed in the dryer with these sheets are absorbing these toxins. “They’ll eventually rest on the skin,” he says. One alternative is mixing a few drops of essential oil with water and misting that solution directly onto bedding and other articles of clothing after they come out of the dryer.



## **Children’s Playroom: Art Supplies**

No parents want to inhibit their children’s creativity. However, when it comes to art supplies, some items need to be carefully monitored. High on the list are permanent and dry-erase markers, which contain solvents, including xylene.

“Xylene is a highly neurotoxic aromatic hydrocarbon which can irritate the nose, eyes, lungs and throat when used near the face,” says Mary Cordaro, a healthy-building and indoor-air-quality consultant in Los Angeles, California, who’s certified by the International Institute for Bau-Biologie and Ecology.

Cordaro advises parents to substitute lead-free colored pencils for permanent markers. Water-based markers, although less toxic than the permanent variety, usually contain toxic alcohols whose released vapors can be inhaled.



## **Nursery: Baby Wipes**

Baby wipes used by many parents may keep their infants clean and comfortable. But these items don’t always keep toddlers safe. The reason, says Cordaro, is an antimicrobial chemical compound called Bronopol – 2-Bromo-2-nitropropane-1,3-diol – that’s a typical baby-wipes’ ingredient. Bronopol is toxic to the skin, immune systems and lungs. Pthalates, which are endocrine disruptors, are also typically found in wipes.

One solution, says Cordaro, is either to buy baby-wipes that are free of these toxic substances, or make your own by experimenting with safe cleansers and emollients. Another option is using simple soap and water.



## **Mud Room: Mold**

What happens when the wet clothes, footwear and sports equipment we stash in the mud room don't dry properly? "Partially wet items that stay wet for an extended period of time are a perfect environment where mold can grow and cause respiratory irritation, coughing and increase the symptoms of asthmas and allergies," says Crinnion. "Research has also found that mold suppresses the immune system, and that depression is linked to a high mold presence in the environment."

One way to decrease the risk of mold growth in the mud room is by wiping off or shaking out excess water before hanging up items. "Getting rid of a constant moisture source is critical," he says.



## **Children's Bedroom: Toxic Furniture**

Parents often think that inexpensive particle-board furniture is good enough for the kids' bedrooms, where beds, dressers and storage units get the brunt of high-energy playtime activities. The issue, says Cordaro, is that plywood and particle board – often called pressed wood – are typically made with formaldehyde or isocyanate glues. "Both these glues are toxic, and the chemicals are out gassed and then inhaled," she says. "And brominated and chlorinated flame retardants, which are often found in upholstered furniture made with polyurethane foam, have been linked to cancer, neurological impairment and hormone disruption."

Cordaro says that even second-hand solid wood furniture is a healthier option. "If you refinish wood pieces, use water-based, lead-free and non-VOC paints or finishes."

